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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes knowledge about team building acquired from participation in a Michigan Adult Education Practitioners Inquiry Project. The first step in team building is to understand the dynamics of the entire group and to identify the unique traits of each member. The paper describes techniques and activities for enhancing communication, cooperation, and collaboration; shared problem solving; and team building. The process of team building is essential to job satisfaction and employee retention and will enhance adult-education programs. (LMI)

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TRYING TO BUILD A TEAM?

GET THEM INVOLVED!

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TRYING TO BUILD A TEAM? GET THEM INVOLVED!

Introduction

Many articles have been written and theories developed on team building. Most of these, however, relate to business and industry and not education; especially the diverse population of adult educators.

As a result of several Saturdays of involvement in a Michigan Adult Education Practitioners Inquiry Project, representatives of three different school districts from the Metropolitan Detroit area attempted to explore these uncharted waters and would like to share their findings.

Team Building Theory

An important first step is to understand the dynamics of the entire group. Tools that can be used to identify the unique traits of each member of the team include: personality analysis (i.e., Enneagram and Myers-Briggs), self-evaluations, teamwork relationship assessments, and utilizing the expertise of an outside consultant. The purpose of exploring and using these various tools is to better understand and appreciate the value and uniqueness that each member brings to the group.

Communication, Cooperation, Collaboration

As a result of understanding the first step--theory, team members grow more accepting of each other which enhances their ability to communicate, cooperate and collaborate. There are a variety of techniques that can be used to facilitate this process:

1. create team meetings--open sharing of ideas emphasizing successes;
2. be a role model;
3. participate in cooperative teaching, mentoring and peer coaching;
4. staff newsletter--have one and use it; and
5. share professional articles with colleagues.

Problem Solving

As you develop collaborative communication, cooperation in other tasks such as problem solving can be addressed. Shared decision making is essential to maintaining a good team. Your team can come to a decision using the consensus model through various brainstorming techniques:

1. surveying (written or verbal);
2. jigsawing (the situation is divided into sections, each member independently explores a piece then the pieces are put back together for a complete picture);
3. fishboning (the question is the backbone, offshoot related factors to create the spine);

4. write and toss (all team members toss solutions into a pile, the pile is then categorized and prioritized); and
5. helping trio ("A" attacks a problem and develops a solution, "B" reviews and revises "A's" solution, "C" reviews and revises "B's" solution, then back to "A.").

The best solutions to problems are generated from placing responsibility with a group rather than with individuals. Group decisions build teams as each member has the opportunity to contribute his or her ideas.

Activities

In addition to problem solving, team building can occur through developing relationships while working together in a variety of school-related projects such as:

1. organizing an in-service;
2. planning an open house;
3. planning and presenting at conferences;
4. creating organized group competition (i.e. sporting events, quiz bowls, incentive parties);
5. developing an employee of the month program;
6. directing and producing skits; and
7. inviting staff members to social events (i.e. shows, dinners).

As team members work together closely, they will discover shared experiences and emotions that will help create a common bond.

Method of Data Collection

This practitioner research report is a culmination of collected handouts and articles, brainstorming sessions, and shared work experiences that have been compiled and formatted for the benefit of other adult educators.

Conclusion

The process of team building is essential to job satisfaction and employee retention and will result in an improved adult education program. By integrating team building theory with cooperation, collaboration, communication, consensus problem solving and a variety of team building activities, a spirited energy will transform individual workers into empowered team members. A team will succeed if you get them involved!